

Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development

Implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals for Indigenous Peoples



End poverty in all its forms everywhere



Reduce inequalities within and among countries

About the OECD's work on Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development

This project was launched on 19 September 2017 at Wendake First Nation, Canada. It includes country case studies and a pan-OECD report that offers policy recommendations for OECD member and non-members under the auspices of OECD Regional Development Policy Committee. This project has closely involved Indigenous leaders and communities in Australia, Canada and Sweden—a network which we hope to expand in the future as we continue work on this topic.

To undertake a country case study or further thematic work with the OECD:

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There are approximately 38 million Indigenous peoples across 12 OECD countries

Indigenous peoples are defined by the United Nations as those who inhabited a country prior to colonisation, and who self-identify as such due to descent from these peoples, and belonging to social, cultural or political institutions that govern them. Indigenous peoples have unique assets and knowledge that address global challenges such as environmental sustainability and that contribute to stronger regional and national economies.

Across far too many indicators there are significant gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations

Indigenous peoples represent about 5% of the world's population, but they comprise 15% of the world's extreme poor and one-third of the rural poor (UN). These gaps are larger in rural and remote areas. For example, gaps in the employment rate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples living in urban regions is on average 8.4 percentage points across a sample of OECD member countries (Australia, Canada, Mexico, New Zealand, Sweden and the United States) whereas it is 20.2 percentage points in rural regions.

Vibrant Indigenous economies are fundamental to self-determination

Economic development gives Indigenous peoples the opportunity to break dependency relationships, use assets that align with their objectives for development and support self-determination. Vibrant Indigenous economies are achievable through the leadership and innovation of Indigenous communities with governments supporting them to deliver on their objectives for development. Activating these opportunities depends on four interconnected elements: i) good data; ii) enabling policies for entrepreneurship and small business; iii) instruments to mobilise land for development, and; iv) effective and inclusive governance.

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Four critical actions for Indigenous economic development

1. Better Indigenous statistics and data governance can inform better policies for Indigenous peoples

Historically, Indigenous peoples have not been visible in national statistics and the quality of statistics are poor. Indigenous statistics and governance can be improved by: adapting well-being measures to better reflect Indigenous values and perspectives, developing specific survey instruments to address knowledge gaps, incorporating traditional territories in geographic classifications for statistics, and supporting Indigenous data sovereignty.



The Laponia World Heritage Site in Sweden has a co-management model that has meaningfully includes the Indigenous Sami people in decision making. This is a leading practice in the country.

2. Place-based policies enable Indigenous entrepreneurship

A place-based approach for development that is led by local Indigenous institutions, identifies competitive advantages, engages stakeholders, and mobilises and coordinates relevant policy instruments is needed. Coherent policy packages that increase access to finance, build business capabilities, and improve access to procurement markets can create this enabling environment.

3. Land rights and security of tenure are a foundation for economic development

Indigenous land rights and clarification of property rights provide the basis for economic development. Indigenous lands are territories and waters that Indigenous peoples traditionally use or occupy. These lands have unique legal status where Indigenous peoples have formal recognition of their status as “first peoples”. Effective governance and clear property rights are critical for Indigenous peoples to shape decision-making about land use, mobilise the economic potential of land, and negotiate benefit-sharing arrangements.

4. Indigenous organisations and communities need to take a leadership role in regional and rural development strategies

Governments need to accelerate the shift from primarily controlling and administering resources and regulations toward playing a more supportive and enabling role. Governments can do this by strengthening Indigenous-led institutions and supporting the formation of networks and alliances that help Indigenous peoples shape decision-making and access resources. A number of tools to achieve this outcome such as Indigenous advisory services, and Indigenous community brokers can facilitate this shift.

Land. If you understand nothing else about the history of Indians in North America, you need to understand that the question that really matters is the question of land.

-- Thomas King, 2012, The Inconvenient Indian.
